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AUTHOR Pancrazio, James J.
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INSTITUTION American Personnel and Guidance Association, Washington, D.C.; Illinois Univ., Urbana. Dept. of Educational Psychology.
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ABSTRACT

This paper explores one approach to dealing with the future; the role of elementary school counselor and elementary classroom teachers in assisting children in attaining greater psychological health. Specifically, three questions are discussed: (1) do counselors have a responsibility? (2) What have counselors done in education? and (3) how might the counselor and teacher make a contribution? In answer to the first, counselors do have an important responsibility and contribution to make in education in attempting to assist others to become members of a society which provides greater human nourishment. In answer to the second question, even though it appears that little has been done in preventive programs for mental health in education, results of experimental programs are certainly encouraging. Prevention is the key concept when answering the third question. Safe, non-threatening relationships should be offered to students. Guided group experiences can be offered by the counselor. Curricular materials should be developed related to psychological health. Both counselors and teachers should be concerned about helping individuals in their total development. (Author/KJ)

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MENTAL HEALTH AND THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL COUNSELOR AND CLASSROOM TEACHER

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by James J. Pancrazio

Introduction

In a recent special issue of Look magazine (1970, p. 21) devoted to the 1970's, the following statement appeared:

> Man has at last collected enough power of various sorts to affect his own revolution, or to destroy himself. Either way, for the first time the choice is his. So far, we have not behaved as if we care to survive. We help each other a little, but the real game is, be the boss. We gnaw at our bleeding flesh bit by bit, only dully curious about why it hurts so much.

When I consider this statement, I am left with a number of reactions. One of these is optimistic: we do have the power to do something; we can make a choice! Another reaction is a more pessimistic one. This includes both a feeling of urgency that we do something now before it is too late and a feeling of concern that we have done so little at this time to help each other.

Concerning the extent to which we help each other, research data reported by Carkhuff and Berenson (1967) are sobering to say the least. In a number of studies of various helpers, including such groups as the general public, college freshmen, lay helpers, and professional counselors, it was found that on the average these groups did not meet even minimal facilitative levels in helping another person. On a five point scale, where 5 is high and 1 is low, and where 3 is the minimal level for facilitation, very few of these groups attained an average of 2; others were below this level. Some of the characteristics of helpers at this level are as follows:

The author is a visiting assistant professor, Division of Counselor Education, Department of Educational Psychology, University of Illinois, Urbana. Paper presented at APGA Convention, New Orleans, 1970.

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1. responds to the superficial feelings of the person being helped
2. continues to ignore deeper feelings
3. communicates little positive regard, displays a lack of concern or interest
4. responds to a prescribed "role".

Carkhuff and Berenson (1967) view our society as failing to provide human nourishment to its members. When one considers the characteristics of helpers described above, it is no wonder that the society is viewed as non-nourishing.

Another sobering finding reported by Carkhuff and Berenson (1967) is that all human processes may have constructive or destructive effects. What I wish to emphasize here are the words "all human processes" Carkhuff and Berenson (1967) state the following:

> Thus, in significant counseling and psychotherapy, teacher-student, or parent-child relationships, the consequences may be constructive or deteriorative on intellective as well as psychological indexes. In addition, there is extensive evidence to indicate that, to a large degree, the facilitative or retarding effects can be accounted for by a core of dimensions which are shared by all human processes, independent of theoretical orientation.

In essence, then, all human processes may be helpful or harmful, and to a large extent whether or not a process is facilitative or retarding is related to the extent to which the core dimensions are present. These core dimensions or conditions are empathic understanding, nonpossessive warmth, genuineness, and concreteness of expression (Carkhuff and Berenson, 1967).

Patterson (1970) defined and discussed these conditions in a paper presenting a model for counseling and other facilitative relationships.

First, empathic understanding includes understanding from another person's frame of reference, knowing what the other person means, being sensitive to another's

current feelings, and communicating understanding to another. Second, nonpossessive warmth refers to a nonjudgmental, nonpossessive caring for another, valuing another as a person, without conditions. Third, by genuineness is meant congruence of the therapist or helper, who is open, honest, sincere, rather than "playing a role." This is not an unrestricted genuineness, rather the emphasis is upon being genuine in a non-destructive manner. Fourth, concreteness of expression means that the therapist and client deal with specific feelings, expericences or behavior, rather than focusing upon abstraction or generality.

As pointed out by Patterson (1970, p. 174) "these conditions are the conditions for all good interpersonal relationships." In terms of helping others, the importance of the core dimensions are not limited to counseling and psychotherapy. They are relevant for people in general and are important in many areas of helping, for example, teaching, parent-child relationships, and counseling. As Truax and Carkhuff (1966, pp. 116-117) pointed out, "the person (whether a counselor, therapist or teacher) who is better able to communicate warmth, genuineness and accurate empathy is more effective in interpersonal relationships no matter what the goal of the interaction...."

As we enter the 1970's, the situation is in many respects bleak. It appears that we have not been the effective helpers we might have been or need to be. There is a need for improvement. On the other hand, we know more about what some of the elements or conditions for help or facilitation are. Likewise, much progress has been made in providing more effective training programs in assisting both lay persons and professionals in more effective helping (Truax and Carkhuff, 1969). Concerning the future, the choice is ours; what can we do?

The purpose of this paper is to explore one approach to dealing with the future: the role of elementary counselors and elementary classroom teachers in assisting children in attaining greater psychological health with the hope that they might become more personally effective and more effective helpers to others.

The term "psychological health" is not easy to define. Probably no single definition can or would be totally adequate or acceptable. After considering various definitions and models for psychological health, I arrived at the following aspects of psychological health, which are similar to a self-actualization model. The healthy individual tends

1. to know and understand himself
2. to relate to others in constructive, facilitative ways
3. to accept self and others
4. to be real, genuine, authentic
5. to be independent, self-directed
6. to be competent in love, work, social situations, problem solving, and to deal with stress effectively.

This paper will focus upon the following three questions concerning psychological health:

1. Do we have a responsibility?
2. What have we done in education?
3. How might the counselor and teacher make a contribution?

Do We Have A Responsibility?

Over ten years ago, Roe (1965) stated that in the field of education we have been reluctant to introduce psychological knowledge in public education. She further added (Roe, 1965, p. 145) that she had "run across only one discussion of the possibility of introducing" psychological knowledge at the elementary school level. More recently, Miller (1969) urged the practice of psychology by nonpsychologists, where the "psychology" was based upon scientifically valid principles. Miller also pointed out (1969, p. 72) that, "when the ideas are sufficiently concrete and explicit, the scientific foundations of psychology can be grasped by sixth-grade children." In discussing the social responsibility of psychology, Patterson (1969, pp. 4-5) offered a number of suggestions. One of his suggestions was as follows:

> But we now know, on the basis of considerable research...
> the basic conditions of good interpersonal relationships...
> If we know some of the principles of such relationships then
> it behooves us to teach them to everyone in our society.

Obviously providing psychological knowledge, scientifically valid principles, or teaching the principles of good interpersonal relationships is not a panacea for the 1970's. The importance of social, political, and economic changes are apparent, but I feel we do have an important responsibility and contribution to make in education in attempting to assist others to become members of a society which provides greater human nourishment.

What Has Been Done in Education?

McCandless (1967) stated that our public schools have tended to neglect teaching human relations. He (1967, p. 560) added that "matters concerning human relations and social responsibility are not taught fully or adequately in... elementary and secondary schools (and probably not in colleges)." He also pointed out that several experiments in the United States and Canada emphasizing preventive and creative mental health, rather than remediation and cure, "have yielded encouraging though tentative results." One such program is the Preventive Psychiatry Project where, curricular materials and stories have been developed which emphasize "psychological problem solving" and "attempt to teach the child to look for causes of behavior." (McCandless, 1967, p. 565). According to Ojemann, (1969, p. 367) data indicates the following:

> ...it is possible to incorporate...psychological concepts throughout the school curriculum and that the teaching of these concepts can be effective. It also appears that the extension of the child's understanding and appreciation of the dynamics of behavior is accompanied by significant changes in such dimensions as manifest anxiety,

tendency to immediate arbitrary punitiveness, anti-democratic tendencies, conception of the teacher, and tolerance of ambiguity.

Another illustration of a special program was described by Bessell (1968) as a 20-minute guided group experience for children. This program focused upon developing an awareness of motives determining personal behavior, increasing self-confidence, and understanding causes and effects in interpersonal relationships. A kindergarten curriculum included such areas as awareness of self and others; positive feelings, thoughts, and behavior; awareness of positive and negative feelings, thought, and behavior. Subjective reports (Bessell, 1968, p. 61) from teachers using the program indicate that "discipline problems are reduced markedly, and that children show increased personal involvement,...more self-confidence, higher motivation...."

Even though it appears that little has been done in preventive programs for mental health in education, results of experimental programs are certainly encouraging.

One other set of studies needs to be mentioned at this point. So far, the discussion has focused upon the curriculum and guided group experiences. As previously pointed out, all human processes may be constructive or destructive. A number of studies reported by Truax and Carkhuff (1967) focus upon the teacher in the classroom. For example, Truax and Tatum (Truax and Carkhuff, 1967, p. 115) found that the degree of warmth and empathy of the teacher was related to positive changes in both the performance and social adjustment of preschool children. Aspy (Truax and Carkhuff, 1967, p. 116) found that third-grade teachers who were warm, empathic, and genuine "were able to produce greater behavior change in terms of reading achievement than those less warm, empathic, and genuine." Apparently, regardless of the goal of the interaction, the core dimensions are an important part of effectiveness. As Hyman (1968, p. 183) stated concerning his study of the description of concepts of the ideal teacher-student relationships, "...the ideal therapist-patient relationship and the ideal teacher-student relationship are but special cases of an ideal person-person relationship." His findings (Hyman, 1968, p. 184) emphasized "the

importance of good communication, of eliminating to some degree the superior-subordinate relations, and of responding warmly to the students."

That teaching may not always be representative of an ideal relationship is apparent in view of various studies of teacher behavior in the classroom. Perkins, (1968) for example, found in a study of 72 fifth-grade students and their teachers over five months that praise was used by teachers only one percent of the time. Hughes (1968, p. 275) in a study of 41 elementary teachers found that the "teaching acts most frequently used were those of control." By control was meant not only discipline, but also goal setting, naming the content, and holding children to a specific answer and working process. Amidon and Hunter (1966, p. 2) raised the following questions:

> Why do researchers engaged in classroom observation find that teachers are so controlling, restrictive, and inhibiting? Why is it that teachers tend to do most of the talking (about 70 percent in the average classroom, according to Flanders)?

These behaviors seem to be in contrast to previous statements regarding the ideal student-teacher relationship emphasizing communication, warmth, and moving toward eliminating the superior-subordinate relationship. Rather, they appear to emphasize that often teacher behavior is controlling, inhibiting, and tending to lack in the use of praise. Concerning the teacher as a helper or as a facilitator, it seems that such qualities as warmth, empathy, and genuineness are important in the atmosphere of the classroom as well as in student achievement.

More importantly, in any human process, whether teaching, parent-child relationships, or counseling, the recipient of the conditions of empathy, warmth, and genuineness appears to gain beyond achieving particular goals such as academic achievement or grades. When a person receives empathy, warmth, and genuineness, he (the recipient) becomes more empathic, warm, and genuine. Patterson (1970, p. 181) states the following:

> The recipient of the conditions begins to manifest the conditions in his own behavior. The conditions are aspects of self-actualization. Self-actualizing people facilitate self-actualization in others...the client, in becoming a self-actualizing person, becomes therapeutic for others by providing the conditions for their self-actualization.

It appears, then, that providing the conditions of a good relationship, as a teacher or as a counselor, not only assists an individual in achieving goals, but also in being better able to help others in their development by becoming more therapeutic for others. It seems that we not only have a responsiblity in the area of psychological health, as well as a contribution to offer, but also that there are a number of ways in which we can be helpful through both effective relationships and curricular offerings.

How Can the Counselor and the Classroom Teacher Make a Contribution?

The emphasis on and importance of elementary school counseling and guidance is currently apparent. Prevention is a key concept. Concerning prevention, both teachers and counselors can make a contribution. Both are (or should be) concerned about helping individuals in their total development, not only in academic achievement. Both offer special skills and competencies necessary for the child's development. It is not necessary for a teacher to become a "counselor" nor is it necessary for a counselor to be an expert on how to teach. They can work together, each offering his own specific unique skills and competencies; they can work as a team, rather than separately, rather than one acting as superior to the other.

The primary responsibilities of the counselor are to provide individual and group counseling. The counselor, also, might on invitation by the teacher, assist in classroom activities related to psychological health as a consultant, or as a

co-teacher. The major focus of this paper is upon three areas: (1) relationship, (2) group experience, and (3) curricular offerings.

First, it is important that safe, non-threatening relationships be offered to students. Hopefully, these relationships will be marked by empathy, warmth, and genuineness. If necessary, special training programs for teachers or counselors geared toward increasing warmth, genuineness, and empathy can be considered. Another possibility might be to explore the areas of teacher verbal behavior in the classroom or the extent to which the teacher is establishing an ideal student teacher relationship.

Second, guided group experiences can be offered by the counselor. If the classroom teacher has the necessary skills and training, he might also provide guided group experiences. This is not a plea for the "teacher as a counselor," nor is it implied that guided group experiences are equivalent to group counseling or group therapy. The teacher's involvement in group experiences should be based upon his training and skills. The teacher's major contribution may be in providing opportunities for discussion in the classroom. Other than Bessell's program previously discussed, Faust (1968) suggests the introduction of "feelings classes," which focus upon developing the following:

a. an awareness that feelings exist

b. an awareness that all people possess, at times, all kinds of feelings

c. an awareness that feelings are not bad, naughty, or immoral

d. an introduction of socially approved methods of expressing feelings

The importance of feelings is highlighted by Leonard (1970b, p. 54) where he states in writing about the future that "we need a world where people can trust their good feelings...." In discussing the need for new sexuality, he (1970b, p. 54) he adds the following statement:

> 'Be a man' often means, 'turn off your feelings, wreak your will upon others and act always out of impersonal rationality.' 'Be a woman,' on the other hand, means 'stay soft and emotional, be submissive, not smart, and act always out of intuition....' We need men who can feel deeply. We need women who can show their intelligence. We need full human beings, proud of their biological differences but unwilling to become puppets marked 'male' and 'female'.

Third, curricular materials could be developed related to psychological health. Various concepts could be explored and discussed in the classroom. Teaching in this area cannot be relegated to merely talking or lecturing, rather I am suggesting that the emphasis be on sharing, exploring, discussing, discovering. Memorizing concepts or definitions to pass an exam or merely collecting information is not enough. To the extent that students think about, question, discuss, and relate the content to themselves and their relationship to others and to their world, it might be useful.

Units or activities may be suggested by students or teachers might suggest topics. Regardless of who suggests topics, appropriateness of a unit can be determined by the students' reaction in terms of interest, importance, need, relevance. Topics such as the following might be considered: nature of communication, sensitivity toward others, nature of perception, perception of self and others, acceptance, individual differences, cultural influence, prejudice, stereotypes. Stories, "case studies," illustrations, or role playing might be used as techniques for presenting and exploring various concepts and ideas. The use of films, filmstrips, cartoons, records, or other visual materials might also be considered. Where materials are not available, students and teachers might develop their own.

As pointed out at the beginning of this paper, we have a choice; we may either affect our revolution or we may destroy ourselves. The suggestions presented may help us to affect our own revolution, rather than our destruction. There is a

need for a society in which individuals provide and are provided with greater human nourishment. Speaking of the 70's Leonard stated (1970, p. 40):

> The order in the future will certainly call for a more sensitive citizen, one who is attuned to his own feelings and the feelings of others, one who has learned a new sense of community and openness with all the other individuals of his social organism.

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